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## Superfund: EPA bosses could shift resources to finalize Portland Harbor plans



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In one sense, our timing on covering [topics related to the Portland Harbor Superfund](#) site this week was pretty darn good.

That's because two high-ranking **Environmental Protection Agency** officials happened to be in Portland to talk about that very topic.

[James Woolford](#), is the EPA's Washington, D.C.-based director of the Office of Superfund Remediation. [Dennis McLerran](#) is the EPA's regional administrator for the Pacific Northwest.

The pair, along with local team members [Lori Cohen](#) and [Kristine Koch](#), met with businesses and community groups as they continue to hammer out Portland Harbor matters.

I caught up with the duo at their offices this week as we put the finishing touches on stories that'll run in our weekly edition on Friday.

Among their messages: That Portland remains a high-priority site for the agency, one that's worthy of shifting resources in hopes of finalizing plans that provide certainty (over clean-up and cost allocations) to waterfront businesses.

Here's what Woolford and McLerran had to say about a number of Superfund topics.

**McLerran on collaboration:** It's important that we address the contamination that's been there for more than 150 years. And it's important that we deliver a cleanup plan that's cost-effective and also (helps) protect human health and the environment. We need to have

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clean properties so the next owners can move forward on it. Economic development on the waterfront is important to everybody."

**Woolford on collaboration:** "I don't think work on this site has been any more or less contentious than others. They're all difficult sites and require high levels of engagement. That said, this is a high priority site for us."

**Woolford on the economic benefits of Superfund:** One of the best-kept secrets of the Superfund program is the redevelopment impact we have across the country. We have experience now on 500 Superfund sites that are in productive use. Those sites have produced 70,000 jobs from reuse. There are literally thousands of businesses on those sites, everything from **Home Depot** to shopping centers. These are the things that benefit communities.

**Woolford on community benefits of Superfund:** Right now, 49 million live within three miles of a Superfund site. These people are disproportionately minority and lower-income. They're living day-to-day. We're helping to protect those individuals who are at a higher risk than most of the American population.

The key is, we need to move the process along. It's long and arduous. (Portland Harbor) is a complex site, but we have a really good team here. And there will be economic benefits. Property values go up: There's a **University of Pittsburgh** study that shows values are up by almost 20 percent (on former Superfund sites).

**McLerran on whether the Portland Harbor site is cleaner since it fell under Superfund auspices in 2000:** Yes. There's been some sediment clean-up and source controls.

The Big Pipe has also been added since then and the state is working with property owners to control runoff.

**McLerran on whether Congressional funding cuts can be blamed for the Portland delays:** We've had budget cuts, and that's been difficult, but Portland is a high-priority site for us and we'll bring resources here to get the job done. If that means borrowing from other resources, we'll do it. Not to say we're not resource-challenged, we are, we're leaner than we were a year ago, but this is a critical site and we'll get that job done.

**Woolford on the same question:** That's right, and from where I sit in D.C., this is a high-priority site. You reallocate resources, shuffle people around. This has an impact on hundreds of people in the community. It's important for us to get it done right.